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# LIVE ART DATA

NEW STRATEGIES IN THEATRE ARCHIVING  
NEUE STRATEGIEN DER THEATERARCHIVIERUNG  
SCOTLAND // NIEDERSACHSEN

Andreas Wolfsteiner/Ekaterina Trachsel/  
Michael Bachmann/Anselm Heinrich (Hg.)

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Neue Strategien der Theaterarchivierung

Scotland // Niedersachsen

unter Mitarbeit von Anne Küper und Frida Stein

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introduction

einleitung

# Live Art Data – New Strategies in Theatre Archiving: Scotland / Lower Saxony

Andreas Wolfsteiner/Ekaterina Trachsel/Michael Bachmann/Anselm Heinrich

## Objectives

When accessing the online catalogue of the German Archive for Theatre Pedagogy (DATP)<sup>1</sup>, based at the University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück/Lingen Campus, the user is confronted with an unadorned interface. At first glance, it appears to be a conventional data instrument. If the user then goes on to search for a term that is deeply rooted in the history of theatre pedagogy – e.g. »model« –, the tool delivers eleven results. In the 1970s in particular, there was a real boom regarding the technical term »model« in the parlance of applied theatre and theatre pedagogy: There is talk of model experiments, model institutions, model pieces, model solutions, model scenographies, stage models, etc. In many ways, the »Live Art Data« project – of which this White Paper offers a first glimpse – is above all a model; it is not yet a stabilized architecture or infrastructure of any kind.

The storability and archiving of ephemeral performances and other live art events can be addressed as one of the core problems in theatre and performance studies, applied theatre, and theatre pedagogy. Against the background of far-reaching digital transformations in all areas of life, new possibilities are emerging today – especially for the archiving of theatrical processes. Scotland, as a devolved nation within the United Kingdom, and Lower Saxony, as a German federated state, are particularly well positioned for an investigation of these changes and the potential that they bring.

For instance, Scotland and Lower Saxony share a number of demographic and structural similarities. A comparative approach allows us to ask, amongst other things, how to navigate the relationship between theatre in devolved/partly sovereign states and the larger political and cultural entities – the UK, Germany, Europe – that they are also part of.

The aim of the trilateral »Live Art Data« project is to establish a sustainable network between three institutions in Scotland and Lower Saxony: the University of Glasgow, the University of Hildesheim, and the University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück. The underlying intention of the network is to discuss questions around the archiving of live performance, including what in Britain is called Live Art, and to evaluate potential ways forward, including possibilities of cross-national and cross-institutional collaboration. »Live Art Data«, as we use this term, refers to the digital and physical data that performance produces, either as an integral part of its aesthetic practice (e.g., the data of digital performance) or as paratexts (playbills, publicity photos, etc.). In the context of this White Paper, we understand live art both in a wide sense – referring to the performing arts, including theatre, more widely – and in a narrow sense, following the British usage of Live Art as a practice related, though not necessarily identical to what elsewhere is often called performance art.<sup>2</sup>

The White Paper is the result of a »book sprint« that took place from October 7–10, 2021, both online and at the Lingen campus of the University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück. The format of the book sprint derives from computer science and other technical disciplines. Usually, it refers to

1 DATP is short for Deutsches Archiv für Theaterpädagogik. This institution is located at the University of Applied Sciences Osnabrück/Lingen Campus. Inventory and other finding aids: <http://datp.findbuch.net>

2 See Stephen Greer's contribution to this volume.

a quick writing and publication process during which informatics, programming, or informational standards are compiled and printed in a short period of time (often over the span of a weekend). As an accelerated model of writing, it is less – or not at all – common in the arts and humanities. For this project, we adapt the book sprint model to the needs of these disciplines.

During this endeavour, participatory and experimental forms of artistic research and digital humanities were analysed in terms of their suitability for archiving and digitising live art.<sup>3</sup> The aim was a transnational comparison and the establishment of a permanent network for the exchange of best practices concerning theatre, performance and live art archives. The White Paper begins by introducing three archival configurations: the situation of theatre and performance archives across Scotland, the German Archive for Theatre Pedagogy (DATP), and the innovative archiving and theatre planning tool NOTAnARCHIVE (section: *cooperating archives*). The remaining sections of the book evolve around four central discourses:

- history and historiography in archives
- theories of the archive, of archiving, and of archival materials
- digital transformation and the archive
- cooperation practices and internationalisation of institutes and institutions

With these points, the project responds to profound changes both in theatre practice as well in the history, theory, and technology of archiving and cross-institutional cooperation in Europe. The history of archival science goes back to the sixteenth century. However, it was not until around the year

2000 that the critical archival science, on which we draw in our approach, developed.<sup>4</sup> In addition, elements of programming, statistics, and recording became increasingly popular in contemporary performance practices.<sup>5</sup> For example, biographical and documentary theatre formats by internationally renowned performance collectives such as Signa, She She Pop, Ligna, Lundahl & Seidl, Rimini Protokoll, Gob Squad, Interrobang, and Monster Truck, contain extensively researched archival »materials«. The places of origin of these nationally and internationally visible new forms of theatre are often Higher Education Institutions that offer training for applied theatre studies. An excellent example of an innovative live art format that operates directly with strategies of documentation – and therefore contains archival material as an integral part –, is the production of *Schwellenland* (2010) by matthaei & konsorten: In the course of the action, the audience is put in the position of *sans papiers* (stateless persons). Then, in the role of »runners«, »guards«, or »mediators«, the participants re-enact all the necessary – sometimes impracticable – steps to obtain a residence permit in a complex communication process (using social media, the internet, mobile phones, and going to the authorities). In addition to the participants, real asylum seekers and refugees are involved in the process – as are actual employees of immigration authorities. In this way, the process of data collection becomes performative and recognisable as a manifestation of the state and its operative mechanisms.<sup>6</sup>

3 cf. Kreuzer, Stefanie (ed.). *Experimente in den Künsten: Transmediale Erkundungen in Literatur, Theater, Film, Musik und bildender Kunst*. Bielefeld, 2014; Schicha, Christian. *Legitimes Theater?: inszenierte Politikvermittlung für die Medienöffentlichkeit am Beispiel der »Zuwanderungsdebatte«*. Münster, 2007, pp. 9ff.

4 Caswell, Michelle/Punzalan, Ricardo/Sangwand, T-Kay. »Critical Archival Studies: An Introduction«. In *Critical Archival Studies*, 1:2 (2017): pp. 1–8, <https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/50/30> (accessed October 3, 2021).

5 cf. Landgraf, Edgar. *Improvisation as Art: Conceptual Challenges, Historical Perspectives*. London, 2011; Bormann, Hans-Friedrich/Brandstetter, Gabriele/Matzke, Annemarie (eds.). *Improvisieren: Paradoxien des Unvorhersehbaren. Kunst – Medien – Praxis*. Bielefeld, 2015.

6 cf. Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven, Connecticut, 1998.

The »Live Art Data« book sprint discusses the archival challenges of theatre and performance studies on historical, theoretical, and technical as well as administrative levels, making the contributions and achievements of the Scottish Theatre Archive and DATP crucial to this network. Archiving and performance practices are increasingly intertwined: programmers play roles in performances; data is presented on stage; statistics enable increasingly common audience participation, etc.: What are the crucial strategies of documenting contemporary stage, performance, and live art?

## Methods

- (1) Artistic research: A main focus of the »Live Art Data« project is on current trends regarding the connection between theory and practice in the mode of artistic and practice-based research. In Germany, artistic research has gained momentum in various academic disciplines and artistic movements over the last decade.<sup>7</sup> Institutions such as the University of Hildesheim have been at the forefront of this development. In the UK, practice-as-research projects have a longer history, especially in theatre studies which combines theory and practice in a different way than German universities do. The University of Glasgow is particularly strong with regard to doctoral practice-based research.
- (2) Engaged and community practice: As an important preliminary work we examine the procedures concerning storage, classification, and utilisation of transitory events.<sup>8</sup> Theatre and performance in Scotland as well as in Lower Saxony help to co-create locations where elusive ideas of community are made perceptible but remain

below the statistically ascertainable. This becomes particularly clear when positive utopian concepts of *communitas* are presented that are not congruent with legal or political ideas of community. These ideas of community and participation propose new forms of living together; they allow for a relationship between the universal and the particular to emerge as a possibility of thought.<sup>9</sup>

- (3) Theory of action: Apart from changes in art history from 1968 to the present,<sup>10</sup> three essential theoretical phases must be taken into account for this project: (a) In the arts and humanities, the shift from semiotic to performative and later to action-based models,<sup>11</sup> as well as the increased importance of artistic research including questions regarding »modes of staging« and processual aesthetics.<sup>12</sup> (b) Equally influential is the theorematized statement of a socio-culturally anchored aesthetics of the performative.<sup>13</sup> (c) Furthermore, there is talk of a veritable »decolonisation of art« in the 1990s.<sup>14</sup> The latter is to be understood as the comprehensive abolition of autonomous aesthetic paradigms. Especially in recourse to historically

7 cf. Klein, Julian. »Was ist künstlerische Forschung?«. In Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften (ed.). *Gegenworte* 23. Berlin, 2010, pp. 24–28; Haarmann, Anke. *Artistic Research. Eine epistemologische Ästhetik*. Bielefeld, 2019.

8 Herrmann, Hans-Christian von. *Das Archiv der Bühne. Eine Archäologie des Theaters und seiner Wissenschaft*. München, 2005.

9 cf. Bukow, Wolf-Dieter. *Urbanes Zusammenleben: Zum Umgang mit Migration und Mobilität in europäischen Stadtgesellschaften*. Wiesbaden, 2009; Blümle, Claudia/Lazardzig, Jan (eds.). *Ruinierte Öffentlichkeit. Zur Politik von Theater*. Berlin/Zürich, 2012.

10 cf. Kreuder, Friedemann/Bachmann, Michael (eds.). *Politik mit dem Körper: Performative Praktiken in Theater, Medien und Alltagskultur seit 1968*. Bielefeld, 2015.

11 Sakoparnig, Andrea/Wolfsteiner, Andreas/Bohm, Jürgen (eds.). *Paradigmenwechsel: Wandel in den Künsten und Wissenschaften*. Berlin/New York, 2014.

12 cf. Lehmann, Hans-Thies. *Postdramatisches Theater*. Frankfurt am Main, 1999.

13 cf. Fischer-Lichte, Erika. *Ästhetik des Performativen*. Frankfurt am Main, 2004.

14 cf. Ashcroft, Bill/Griffiths, Gareth/Tiffin, Helen. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London, 1989; Balme, Christopher B. *Decolonizing the Stage: Theatrical Syncretism and Post-Colonial Drama*. Oxford, 1999; Gilbert, Helen/Tompkins, Joanne. *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. London, 1996.

effective forms of theatre (such as Augusto Boal's »Invisible Theatre«, Jerzy Grotowski's plea for a »Poor Theatre«, or the renaissance of Peter Weiss' documentary theatre), spaces that resist the unambiguous allocation to artistic genres are being created.<sup>15</sup> These reflexive points of departure are often embedded in performative and playful settings which help to visualise communal practice and its institutional paradoxes in a laboratory of the senses.<sup>16</sup> There are loose connections here to political and activist forms of theatrical communication – such as *direct action*, as well as practices of *situationism* or *operaism*.<sup>17</sup>

Too often, however, the talk of decolonisation remained metaphorical and changed little in terms of the institutional Whiteness and Eurocentrism of curricula, research, and departmental structures.<sup>18</sup> Only recently, particularly in light of the global uprising following the murder of George Floyd,<sup>19</sup> have institutions (includ-

ing archives and theatre departments) begun to take anti-racist work more seriously – though a lot of work remains to be done.

## Mapping the Field

One special feature of this book sprint is the combination of archival research with theatre pedagogical and performative elements. The institutions involved in the project benefit from their vivid contact to current European theatre scenes – as well as the state of the art of digital humanities in the field of performance archiving. The collaborating archives are dedicated to the question of how the current changes in live art can be understood as »data theatre«, each to be renegotiated and determined by ecological and economic dispositives. Technical solutions and performance analysis should not be divided into a black box »inside«, the opaque part of archival functionings, and a public-facing »outside«, the transparent public sphere that determines the grammar of archives. Not only for this reason is the comparative European perspective of our project valuable in the times of Brexit.

This publication has been developed as a White Paper rather than a fully-fledged collection. As such, it intentionally bears the traces of its making during – and in the weeks leading up to – the book sprint in October 2021, after which it has been swiftly put to print. An Open Access version is available online. The White Paper focuses on archive software, databases, and archival holdings. Rather than only focusing on technical requirements and necessities, it also asks what is possible within these constraints: How can the increased linking between performance events and databases/archives be taken into account? What could »theatre informatics«<sup>20</sup> do for the comprehensive action-theoretical mapping? Glasgow brings a long-standing expertise in digital humanities concerning theater studies and a track record of exter-

15 cf. Nikitin, Boris/Schlewitt, Carena/Brenk, Tobias (eds.). *Wirklichkeit: Materialband zum zeitgenössischen Dokumentarischen Theater*. Berlin, 2014.

16 As Patrick Primavesi puts it, it's all about: »The transformation of the stage into a laboratory, the performance into an experiment, and the audience into an experimental object«. (Orig. Ger., translated by AW: »Die Transformation der Bühne in ein Labor, der Aufführung in ein Experiment, und des Publikums in ein Testobjekt«). Primavesi, Patrick. »Theater als Labor und Experiment«. In Kreuzer, Stefanie (ed.). *Experimente in den Künsten: Transmediale Erkundungen in Literatur, Theater, Film, Musik und bildender Kunst*. Bielefeld, 2014, pp. 131–162, p. 153.

17 cf. Graeber, David. *Direkte Aktion: ein Handbuch*. Hamburg, 2013; Warstat, Matthias. »Als ob kein Staat wäre. Theaterwissenschaft, Protestforschung und direkte Aktion«. In Gerda Baumbach et al. (eds.). *Momentaufnahme Theaterwissenschaft. Leipziger Vorlesungen*. Berlin, 2014, pp. 32–46.

18 cf. Revolution or Nothing. »White Colleague Listen! An Open Letter to UK Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies«, <https://medium.com/@revolutionornothing/white-colleague-listen-2d098d6a4a5d>, August 24, 2020 (accessed October 10, 2021).

19 cf. Gaines, Kevin. »Reflections on Ben Okri, Goenawan Mohamad and the 2020 Global Uprisings«. In: *Journal for Trans-*

*national American Studies* 12:1 (2021): pp. 9–44.

20 cf. Otto, Ulf. *Internetauftritt: Eine Theatergeschichte der neuen Medien*. Bielefeld, 2013, p. 87. The term »Theaterinformatik« (theatre informatics) was coined by Arnold Grether.

nally funded research projects working at the interface of performance historiography, live art, and archiving. Performance studies at Hildesheim has for some time focused on new data-intensive theatre formats (the theatre collectives *Machina eX* and *VOLL:MILCH* being among their graduates), at the forefront of artistic informatics and programming. Osnabrück, with its many years of experience in the multimedia documentation of various theatre pedagogical formats at the DATP, covers the area of public education far better than a focus on specialized art scenes could. Last but not least, the NOTAnARCHIVE project is of particular relevance to our collaboration. This is a project funded by the Ministry of Science and Culture of Lower Saxony (MWK) within the conceptual funding of the performance collective *VOLL:MILCH*, founded in 2011 at the University of Hildesheim. NOTAnARCHIVE takes seriously both the classical tasks of an archive and the actual production conditions and aesthetics of the independent theatre scene. It is not an archive software solution, but a digital rehearsal stage for archive theory and practice.

Our project builds on existing networks of the former DFG Research Training Group »InterArt/Interart Studies« (FU Berlin) and strengthens the connections between programmes in theatre studies and theatre pedagogy at the universities of Glasgow, Hildesheim, and Osnabrück. All three departments combine interests – and research expertise – in media, theatre, and cultural studies, and are connected to archival expertise. Kindly funded by the »Scotland Initiative« of the Ministry for Science and Culture in Lower Saxony, the book sprint and the resulting White Paper form part of a developing strategic partnership between Lower Saxony and Scotland.

The global COVID pandemic of 2020–21 has made the project even more timely than we could have anticipated. Currently, a significant amount of digital data is produced by theatres (due to online and digital performance formats new types of participatory projects and scenographic practices, etc.).<sup>21</sup> In some countries more than in others, in-

creased funding has been made available for data-based live art and digital projects in theatre and performance. Hence, SARS-CoV2 is not only a worldwide health crisis – it is also a global »rupture épistémologique«<sup>22</sup> (epistemological rupture) as Gaston Bachelard put it at the end of the 1930s. This rupture concerns the transformation of knowledge and aesthetics in the light of digital technologies, and one of the reasons why a White Paper on the »state of the archive« is so important today.

## Acknowledgements

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21 Weir, Lucy/Bissell, Laura (eds.). *Performance in a Pandemic*. London, 2021.

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This White Paper is the result of a cross-institutional collaboration between Scottish and German researchers, artists, and programmers. The volume brings together historical, theoretical, and digital research into archival practices of storing and dealing with »Live Art Data« in a comparative approach that encompasses both historical and contemporary practices. It is interested in data that is produced in theatres and other cultural venues, in theatre pedagogical projects, by performing artists, and their audiences. From an interdisciplinary perspective, the White Paper looks at archival configurations and relations of performative data in teaching and information infrastructures today, focusing on four aspects: historiography, theory, digitalization, and the international dimension.

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